



MADISON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Superintendent

March 11, 2014

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RE: Testimony for HB 5078: Act Imposing a Moratorium on the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee on Education,

It is my hope that we are opening the door to intellectually honest discourse, based on the research and evidence before us, to encourage all involved to think independently, to ask hard questions, and to consider the intended and unintended consequences of our policies, just as we teach our students to do.

The fever pitch that has grown over the implementation of the common core state standards does in fact have its roots in well-founded concerns. Those concerns are twofold, quite simply, the process by which the standards were adopted, and the actual content of the standards. To further complicate this issue, the common core is cloaked in a series of false narratives, or urgent calls to action, along with declarations, or promises made about the future impact of the standards, which have been questioned by prominent and established scholars. Finally, the common core is at the intersection of other initiatives, namely, educator evaluation and a new generation of high stakes standardized tests, the Smarter Balanced test (SBAC).

Focused solutions and resources are always best served by accurately framing the problem. The call for higher standards is a compelling "sound byte", however, this may be a proposed solution searching for a problem to solve. A deep analysis by the Brookings Institute demonstrates that, after three decades of being at the center of education reform, "States have tried numerous ways to better their schools through standards. And yet, good and bad standards and all of those in between, along with all of the implementation tools currently known to policymakers, have produced outcomes that indicate one thing: Standards do not matter very much." Additionally, by examining performance on the only current common national assessment, the NAEP test, the 2012 Brown Center Report on American Education analyzed the variation of student performance within an individual state, known as the achievement gap. It noted that, "Common state standards might reduce variation between states, but it is difficult to imagine how they will reduce variation within states. After all, districts and schools within

and parents across the state. All of the promise of the common core, and there is promise in a number of the standards, is lost due to a failure to invite honest, transparent discourse, and hard questions.

The common core is now inextricably linked to evaluation reforms and the new SBAC high stakes state test. In order to realize any promise the common core has to offer, an effort must be made to untangle these reforms. The question today is whether or not a moratorium is appropriate, or even reasonably possible?

As I feel it is the responsibility of every educational leader to raise critical questions and thoughts about important issues, I'd like to offer the following:

1. Engage in the process with Connecticut's early childhood experts to genuinely examine the evidence related to the developmental appropriateness of the standards. This matter is not settled and communities need reassurance that our youngest learners will receive a developmentally appropriate education in light of the common core and accompanying SBAC test. Examine the viability of a standards and testing contingency plan in the event the findings necessitate such action.
2. In an effort to untangle the multiple reforms, revisit the NCLB waiver that was filed with the U.S. Department of Education. The renewal process of the waiver offers an opportunity to modify its provisions. For instance,
 - Although federal law requires states to annually administer statewide standardized tests, the waiver only requires teacher evaluation systems to "take into account multiple valid measures, including as a significant factor, data on student growth.
 - None of the NCLB waiver materials that I'm aware of make any reference to standardized tests, in fact, the phrase most often used is "multiple valid measures".
 - A case can be made that Connecticut's application far exceeded the requirements of the waiver by, among other things, linking statewide standardized tests to evaluations
 - Other states received waivers without making this link or indicating a set percentage that such testing would be worth in evaluations
3. Given that the root of most concerns can be drawn back to the misuse of high stakes standardized tests, as you revisit the NCLB waiver, aggressively pursue modifications that:
 - Permanently decouple any use of high stakes standardized tests (SBAC) with the evaluation of individual teachers or principals by following the volumes of literature clearly demonstrating the harmful unintended consequences and lack of validity of this practice
 - Eliminate the current meaningless teacher evaluation scoring/weighting systems
 - Eliminate "one size fits all" compliance mandates by:
 - Granting more control to local boards of education to develop evaluation systems and innovations that fit the context and needs of their districts
 - Use high stakes tests (SBAC) judiciously and not in a high stakes manner